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PROGRAMME PLANNING

Country and intercountry programmes and projects

FIFTH COUNTRY PROGRAMME FOR BANGLADESH

Note by the Administrator

I. PROCESS OF THE PROGRAMMING EXERCISE

1. The country programming exercise began with the mid-term review of the fourth country programme, held in April 1989. The substantive recommendations of the review - in brief to emphasize human development, economic management and the environment rather than physical infrastructure - were confirmed in the Advisory Note and in fact are also the central themes of the Government's fourth Five-Year Plan (July 1990 to June 1995). Thus, the recommendations of the Advisory Note are fully reflected in the content of the country programme. The country programme exercise was formally launched with the Advisory Note of June 1990 and the Government has expressed concurrence with the country programme document, which was finalized in December 1991.

2. Another major conclusion of the mid-term review was that the formulation and implementation of the fourth country programme reflected the deficiencies of the third Five-Year Plan. As in the case of the third Plan itself, programme formulation was weak because the projects were selected ahead of country programme objectives. Consequently, a lengthy review of priorities became necessary during programme implementation. In the current fourth Five-Year Plan, however, the Government has focused on setting strategies and programmes which aim at transforming society and which adopt a human-centred approach to development through better managed growth with greater social equity. These strategies will themselves require considerable formulation before they begin to have an impact on development. At the same time, severe resource constraints and the large number of

spillover projects from the third Plan have required the Government to conduct a strict priority setting exercise in 1990. In addition to reflecting the results of this exercise in the firm pipeline, the emphasis in the fifth country programme has been to allocate resources in support of the major human development strategies of the Government.

3. Programming efforts were initiated through a series of missions in the following areas: environment (the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)), science and technology (UNDP), education (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), population (the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Development Association (IDA)), information technology (UNDP), management development (UNDP), urban sector (the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) (UNCHS)), local-level planning and macro-planning (the United Nations Department for Technical Cooperation for Development (UNDTCD)), crop agriculture (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)), women in development (UNDP), water supply and sanitation (UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), IDA), rural energy (UNDP), flood action plan (IDA), and disaster mitigation (UNDP). The majority of these programming exercises were financed from Development Support Services (DSS), Special Programme Resources (SPR) or through indicative planning figure (IPF)-financed projects. Thus, the fifth country programme reflects these priority programme areas and in each case, the nature and scope of the UNDP support will be further defined through continuous programming. Attention has also been paid to the UNDP role in implementing the recommendations of the report on "Strengthening the Institutions for Food-Assisted Development" (SIFAD), jointly supported by the Government, donors and WFP. In addition, consultations are ongoing to identify other donor inputs which may be required for co-financing or cost-sharing.

4. Another major element of the fifth country programme will be to operationalize the results of the "Study and Evaluation of the Impact of Technical Assistance in Bangladesh" (SEITAB), which complements work already done in the areas of commodity and project aid. The results of the study were available only towards the end of the programming exercise. The Government has agreed to formulate new technical assistance policy and programming procedures, on the basis of this study, which will be discussed at a local consultations group meeting, the principal donor coordinating mechanism in Bangladesh. The study puts particular emphasis on needs assessment for capacity-building and to extending the overall SEITAB methodology to other sectors.

5. Since February 1990, a steering committee chaired by the External Resources Division has met within the framework of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), involving UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and also included the World Health Organization (WHO). Consequently, collaborative programmes are being developed in areas of common concern such as population, health systems, nutrition, maternal and child care, education, food for work for development and rural credit, and grass-roots development.

6. The fifth country programme has close links to the priorities for the intercountry programme. Furthermore, the government-chaired steering group on the

fifth country programme has directed the various aspects of the programming exercise and provided the link between the work on prioritization, planning, JCGP and SEITAB, to ensure a cohesive approach to the use of UNDP resources.

7. The fifth country programme, which will last four, not five years, will dovetail with the activities of the fourth Five-Year Plan, which began in July 1990. Of the $163.1 million available to Bangladesh in the fifth cycle, an IPF of $114.2 million will be programmed during the period July 1991 to June 1995. This IPF will be augmented by a carry-over of $19.5 million. Other possible non-IPF resources, specifically from SPR and the Special Measures Fund for the Least Developed Countries (SMF/LDC), have yet to be established. A total of $156.75 million is therefore being programmed for the fifth country programme.

II. ANALYTICAL COMMENTARY ON THE FIFTH COUNTRY PROGRAMME

8. The fifth country programme for Bangladesh is the largest LDC programme and the second largest UNDP country programme. There are three programme objectives: (a) poverty alleviation and people's participation in development; (b) environment and natural resources management; and (c) economic management and administrative restructuring. These objectives are highly selective and focus on areas where UNDP technical cooperation could best contribute to the attainment of national goals and priorities. The final selection of these objectives was guided by the country's long-term Perspective Plan (1990-2010) and the fourth Five-Year Plan (1990-1995) on the one hand and, on the other hand, by the UNDP priority themes for the fifth programming cycle as stipulated in Governing Council decision 90/34. Approximately one third of the programme resources are allocated to each of the objectives.

9. In Bangladesh, UNDP is well established as a principal partner for development thanks to its neutrality, its in-country presence, its access to diverse sources of information and its development experience world wide. In this capacity, UNDP has played an important role in assisting the Government to assess and identify new programme areas and, through this process, to mobilize and catalyse other donor contributions, often in the form of joint financing and/or cost-sharing. UNDP has demonstrated leadership particularly in the areas of public policy, sector planning, institution-building and development planning at central and local levels. These advantages are especially relevant to the design and implementation of human development programmes for which new institutional capabilities will have to be created. In environmental and natural resource management, UNDP is acknowledged as a catalyst with its sponsorship of such influential initiatives as the national environmental action plan, the agriculture sector review and the flood action plan.

10. In cognizance of this unique position, it has been agreed that the fifth country programme, in addressing the three programme objectives, should focus on assisting the Government in: (a) policy-level analysis, sector- and thematic-based programming initiatives, master plans and reform programmes; (b) independent assessment of investment feasibility and support for studies in innovative areas; (c) articulation and support to the strategies of the fourth Five-Year Plan, especially the focus on human development; and (d) adherence to needs assessments

as forerunners to capacity-building in priority development programmes. UNDP will continue to play its catalytic role in donor fund mobilization, in programming for the three objectives, and in supporting the Government's efforts in aid coordination.

11. In the light of the mid-term review and the fourth Five-Year Plan, the fifth country programme reflects the new emphasis on human development strategies in the Plan, on mainstreaming women-in-development issues in priority programme areas, on the environment and in such areas as planning, science and technology and economic management. In each case, the criteria used have focused on the role of UNDP in supporting the Government's policy and programming work; in strengthening coordination of donor contributions; improving the efficiency of operations (in Government and in public and private enterprises); and at the same time supporting specific priority sector programmes relevant to major thematic areas. Thus, during the first years of the Plan, considerable further programme work is required in articulating its major strategies. In the meantime, the major sector programmes within the overall strategy have been developed to ensure programme continuity in relevant priority sectors, based largely on the mid-term review recommendations and reviewed in the specific context of the Plan.

12. UNDP is actively involved in aid coordination through the mechanism of the local consultations group and takes the lead in the subgroups on technical assistance, urbanization, environment, disaster mitigation, rural energy, planning, and science and technology. UNDP also participates in the consortium programmes in education, population and health, rural infrastructure, water resources, fisheries and forestry, cereal production, enterprise reform and finance sector management. There are a number of areas where a programme approach relating to the Government's sectoral priorities is being promoted, initially focusing on interventions in education, environment, agriculture, water and in planning. The area of greatest uncertainty is administrative restructuring, where further dialogue is necessary to define specific interventions.

III. MANAGEMENT OF THE FIFTH COUNTRY PROGRAMME

13. The management of the fifth country programme needs to reflect the dynamic aspects of the Five-Year Plan strategies and the constraint of resource-bound annual programming of the Government development programme. To facilitate this process, the Government has established steering and working group mechanisms. Regular meetings at the working level will also expedite day-to-day decision-making on the implementation of the programme. The mid-term review and annual reviews will use the steering group and working group mechanisms. This approach, involving interministerial meetings when necessary, will help to reduce the delays which have been of concern to the general donor community and which are being addressed over the longer term through the implementation of the recommendations of the project aid utilization study and SEITAB project, funded by UNDP.

14. The Government has also taken the initiative to create a steering group on joint programming, in line with General Assembly resolutions on the subject. This is expected to help the United Nations system focus its efforts in support of the

development of Bangladesh. In the implementation of the technical assistance policy now being formulated on the basis of the recommendations of the SEITAB study, it is expected that the group will be broadened by other donors to discuss overall policy and programming issues related to technical cooperation.

15. The Government is committed to national execution. The task force established to facilitate its generalization is working on a manual for National Project Directors and a series of training programmes in 1991 for them, their assistants and accountants, so that the recent rapid expansion (from nil to 12 operational and pipeline projects) may be sustained in the fifth country programme.

16. In order to improve management capacity and enhance programme cohesion and impact, attempts will be continued to reduce the number and increase the size of UNDP projects. This was one of the practical recommendations for the streamlined management of the fifth country programme highlighted by the mid-term review of 1989.

17. The Government also believes strongly in capacity-building through development of the local consultancy industry. In a number of sectors, specific interventions will be made to develop that capacity further. The Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) programme has grown rapidly and is expected to become an established modality for effective transfer of technologies and know-how. Efforts will also be made to increase the use of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for programme activities and of United Nations volunteers as well. Increased application of the technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC) modality will be attempted in the areas of agriculture, environment, education and industrial development, while Bangladesh is able to share its successful experience in grass-roots development through NGOs.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

18. In summary, the fifth country programme for Bangladesh supports the new direction and strategies for national development as adopted in the fourth Five-Year Plan documents. It focuses on policy level analysis, programming initiatives, master plans, feasibility assessment and human development and capacity-building in the three priority areas, and will catalyse and cooperate with other donor inputs. Thus, the Programme ensures the use of UNDP technical cooperation in such a way as to maximize its impact and its contribution towards the attainment of the stated national goals and objectives. It is also directly in line with the Governing Council's stipulations on the global priority focus areas for the fifth programming cycle.

19. The Administrator recommends that the Governing Council approve the fifth country programme for Bangladesh.